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READERS

AMERICAN FOLK

A TALE OF THE UN-MEN™

DAVE LOUAPRE
DAVE LOUAPRE
VINCE LOCKE
VINCE LOCKE

final exhibition

GAZ & BRUNING

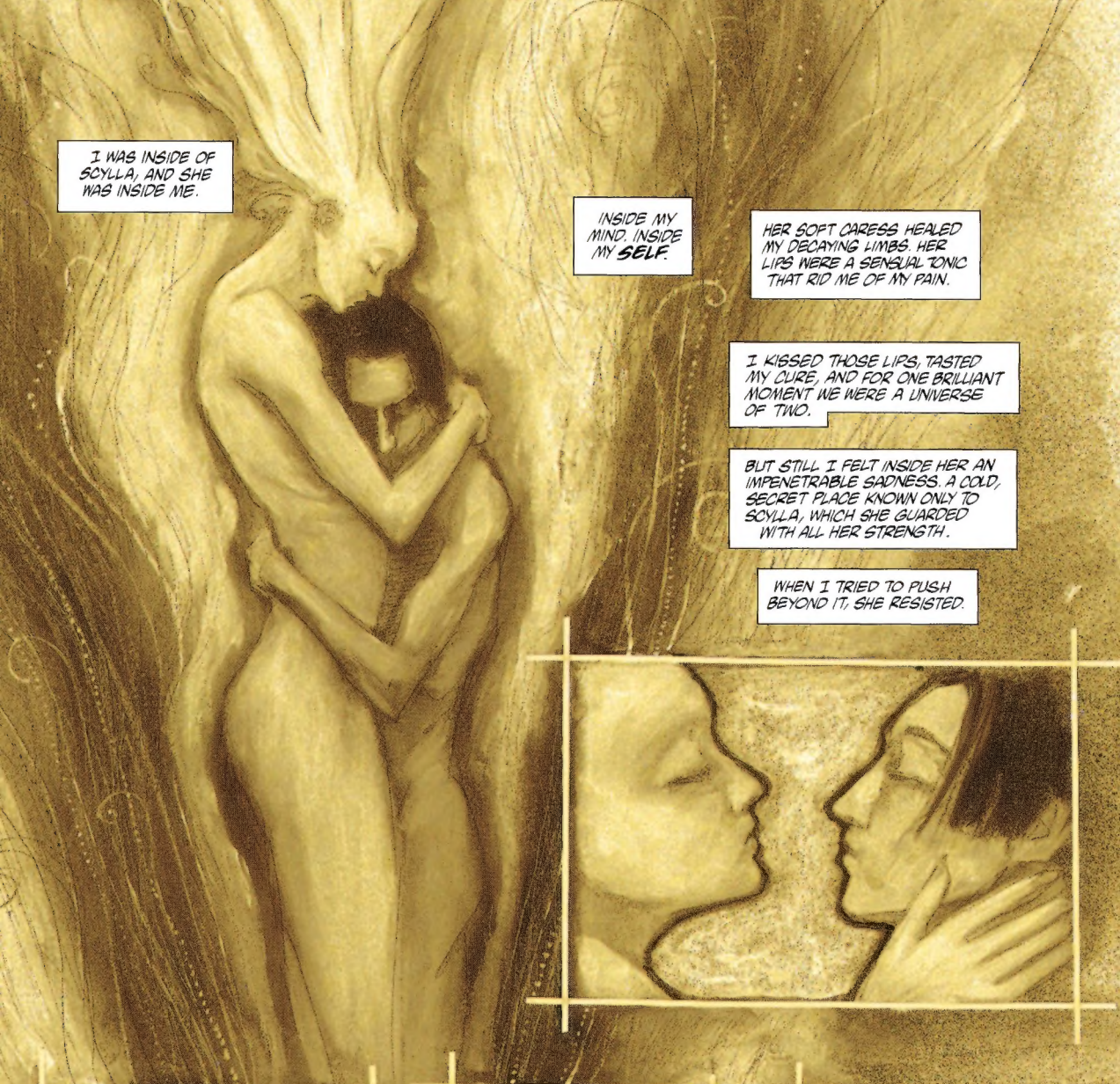
AMERICAN

A T A L E O F T H E U N - M E N

CHAPTER FIVE:

VINCE LOCKE
COVER ARTIST
GAZ
COVER PHOTOGRAPHER
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BRUNING
EDITOR
THE UN-MEN CREATED BY LEN WEIN AND BERNIE WRIGHTSON
RICHARD
EDITOR
CHRIS CHUCKRY
COLORIST





I WAS INSIDE OF
SCYLLA, AND SHE
WAS INSIDE ME.

INSIDE MY
MIND. INSIDE
MY **SELF**.

HER SOFT CARESS HEALED
MY DECAYING LIMBS. HER
LIPS WERE A SENSUAL TONIC
THAT RID ME OF MY PAIN.

I KISSED THOSE LIPS, TASTED
MY CURE, AND FOR ONE BRILLIANT
MOMENT WE WERE A UNIVERSE
OF TWO.

BUT STILL I FELT INSIDE HER AN
IMPENETRABLE SADNESS. A COLD,
SECRET PLACE KNOWN ONLY TO
SCYLLA, WHICH SHE GUARDED
WITH ALL HER STRENGTH.

WHEN I TRIED TO PUSH
BEYOND IT, SHE RESISTED.



AND WHEN I TRIED TO
TAKE IT FROM HER...

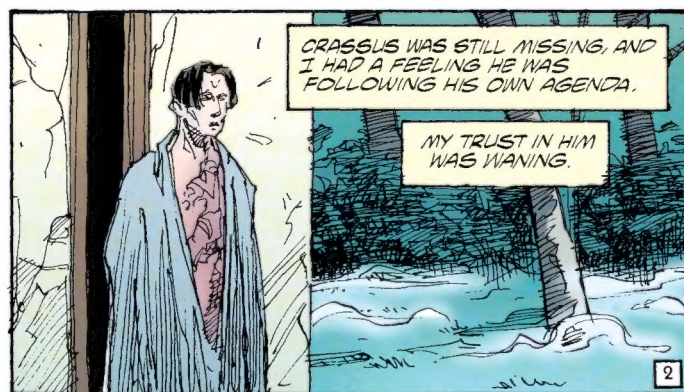
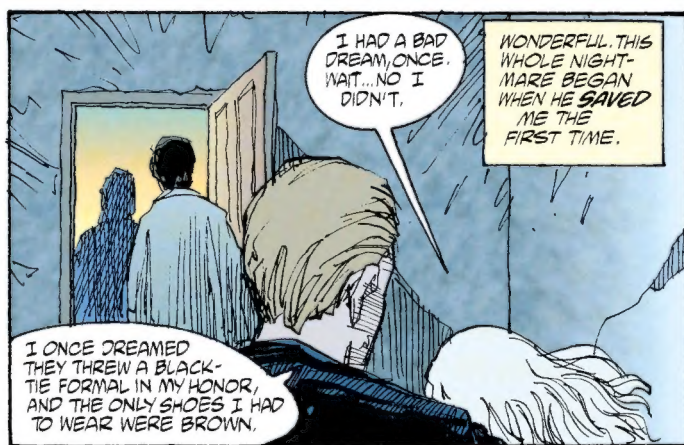
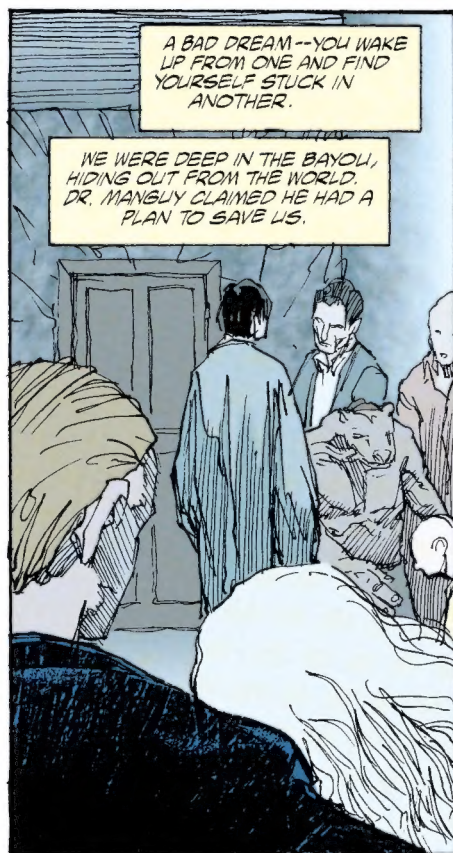
SHE RECOILED
IN CHILDLIKE FEAR.

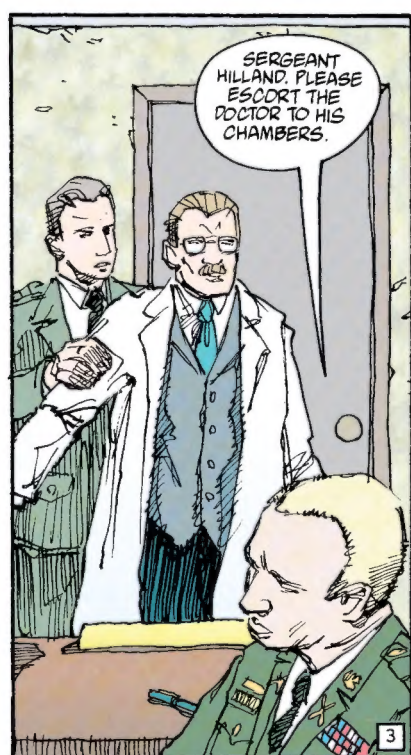
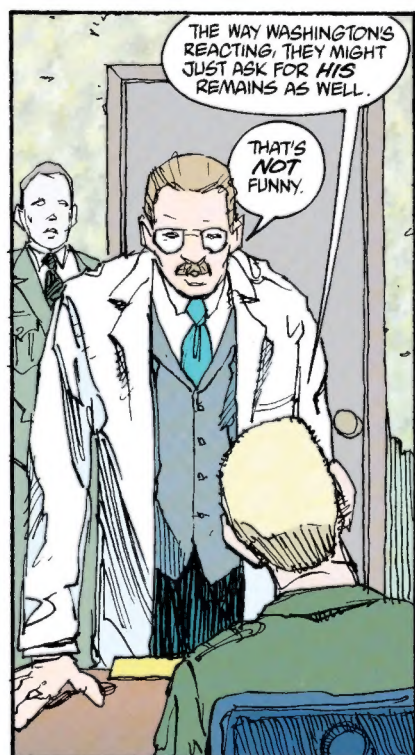
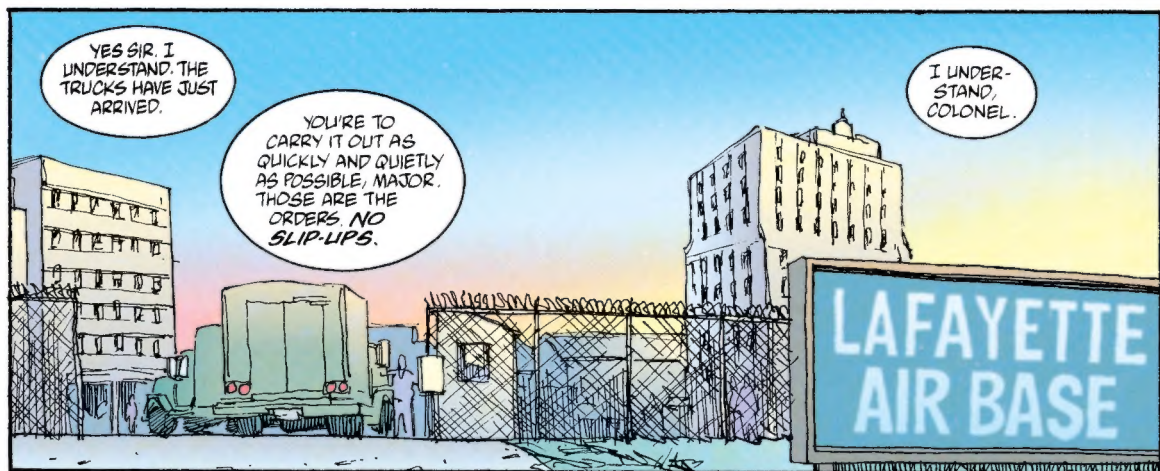


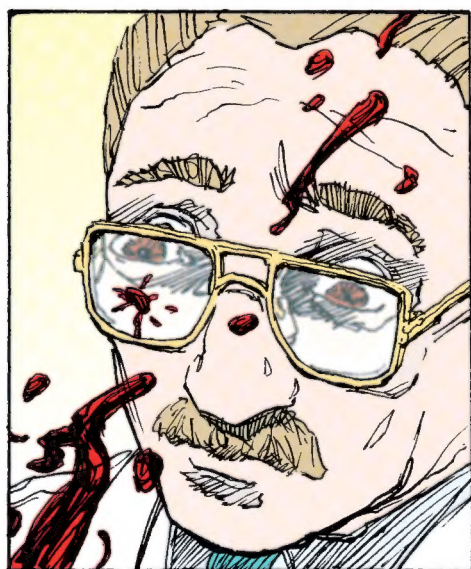
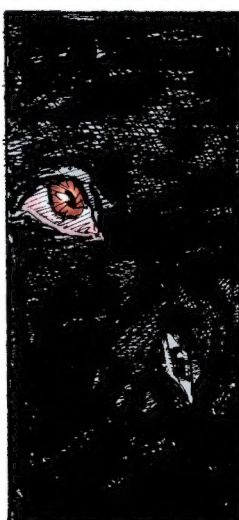
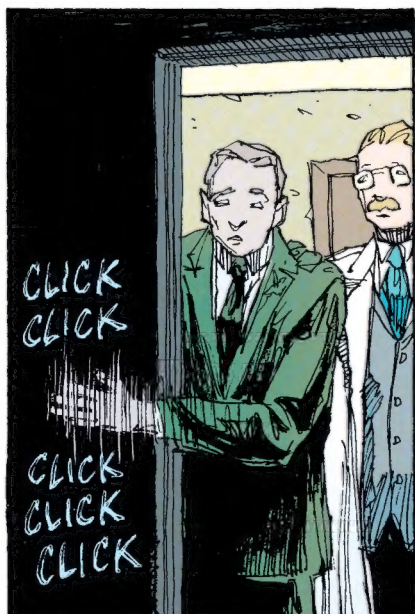
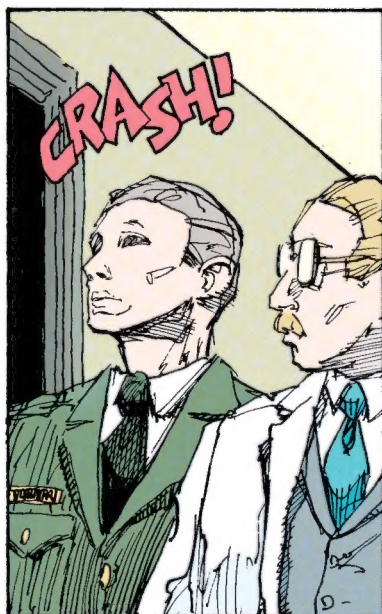
I LOVE
YOU,
SCYLLA.

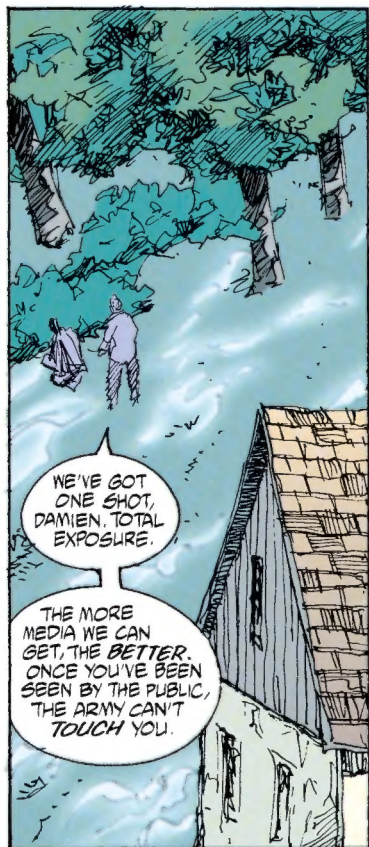


AYE









WE'VE GOT ONE SHOT, DAMIEN. TOTAL EXPOSURE.

THE MORE MEDIA WE CAN GET, THE BETTER. ONCE YOU'VE BEEN SEEN BY THE PUBLIC, THE ARMY CAN'T TOUCH YOU.



BUT THE LONGER YOU STAY HIDDEN, THE MORE TIME THEY HAVE TO FIND YOU. FIND US. IF *THAT* HAPPENS...

SO WHAT'S YOUR PLAN, DOC? YOU GONNA PUT ME ON *OPRAH*?

MAYBE.



THE PLAN IS SIMPLE. WE LEAVE TONIGHT.

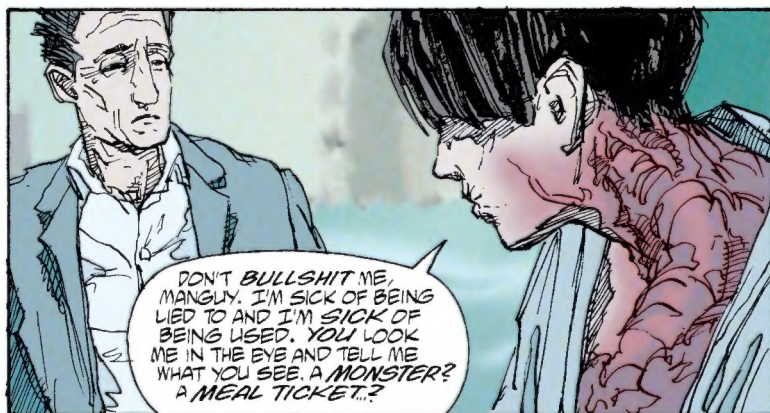
I'VE ARRANGED FOR SOME REPORTERS TO MEET US UP NEAR SLIDELL. THIS COULD BE THE MOST IMPORTANT STORY OF THE CENTURY, DAMIEN. OF ALL TIME.



IS THAT RIGHT? THEN WHAT? YOU MAKE THE COVER OF TIME AS THEIR *MAN OF THE YEAR*? TAKE US ON THE LECTURE CIRCUIT?

MAKE A FORTUNE OFF YOUR AUTO-BIOGRAPHY?

THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT.

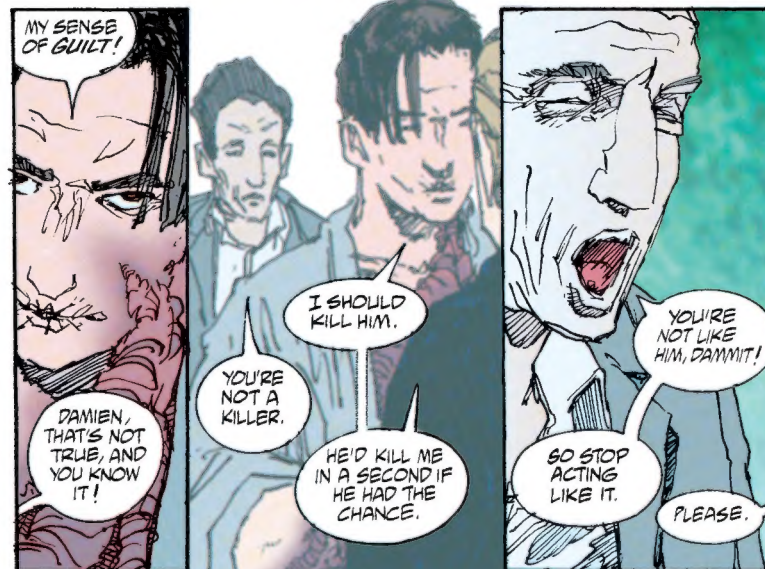
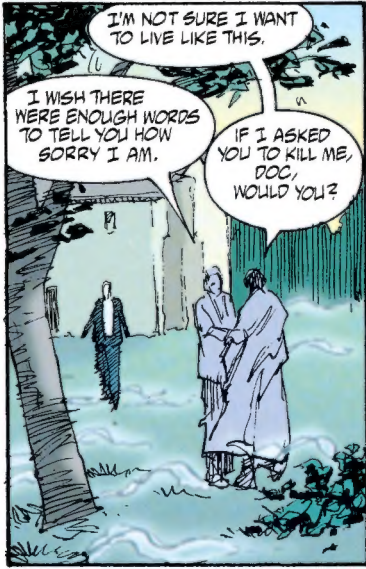


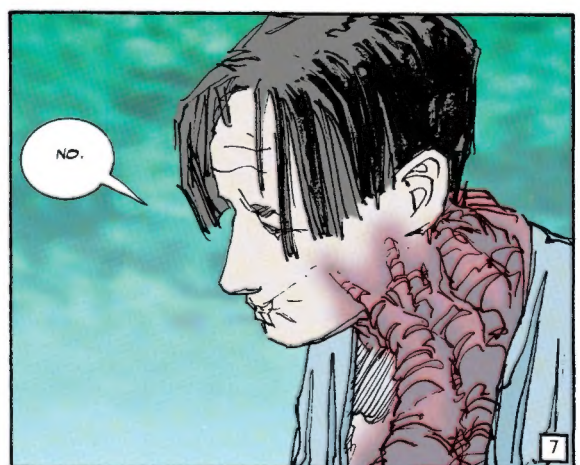
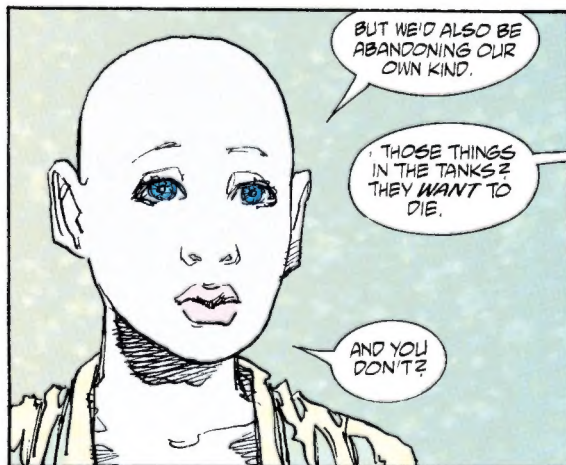
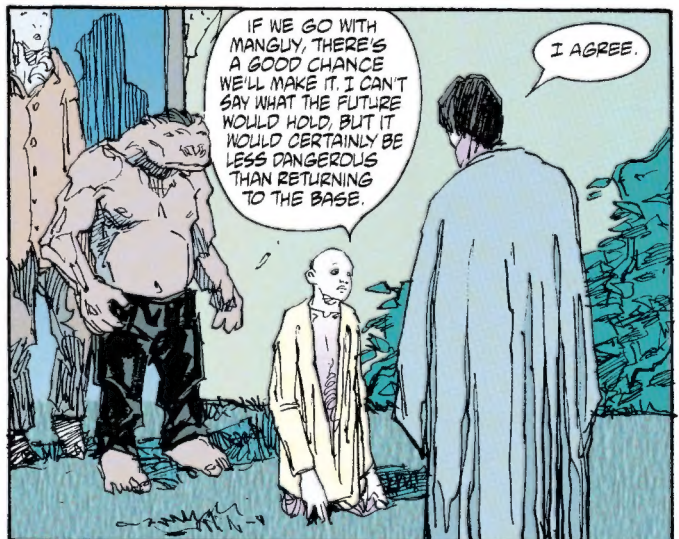
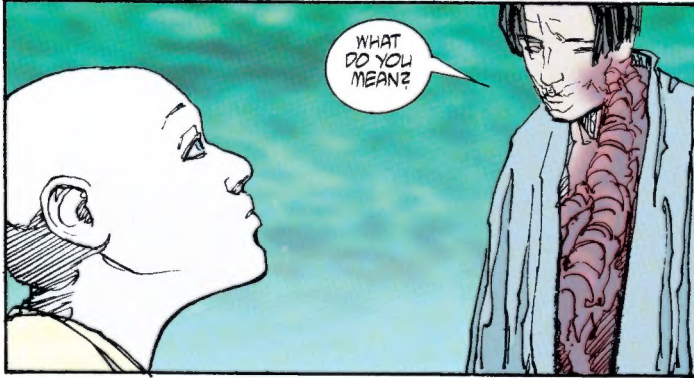
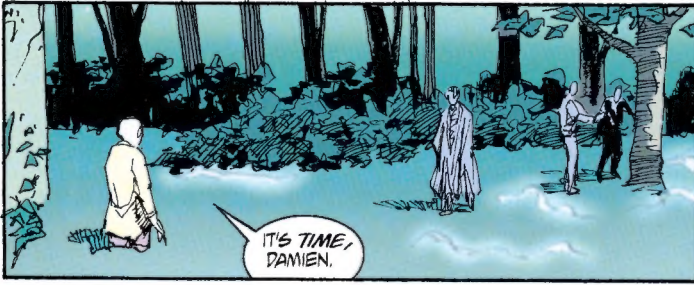
DON'T BULLSHIT ME, MANGLY. I'M SICK OF BEING LIED TO AND I'M SICK OF BEING USED. YOU LOOK ME IN THE EYE AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE. A MONSTER? A MEAL TICKET.?

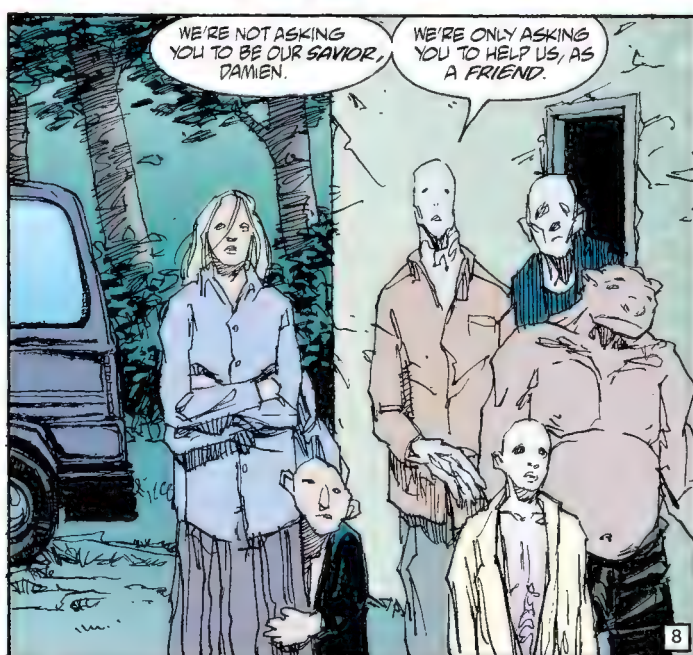
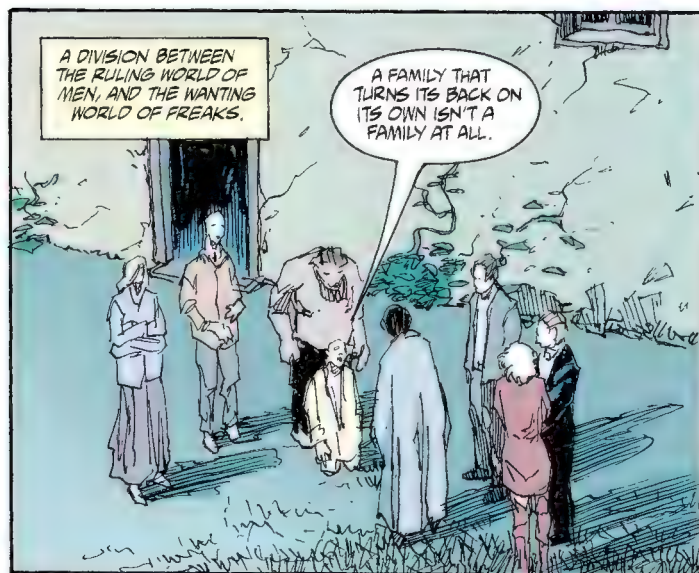
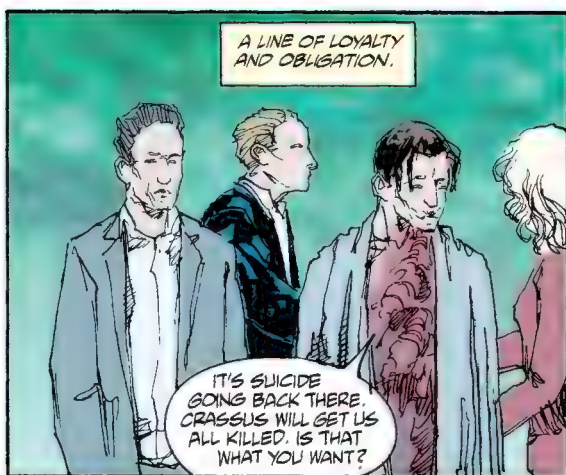
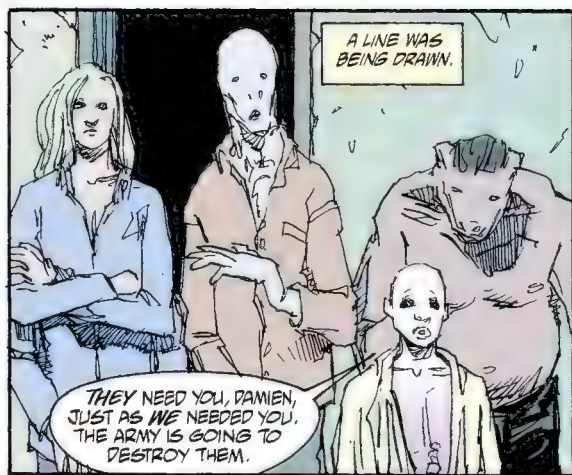


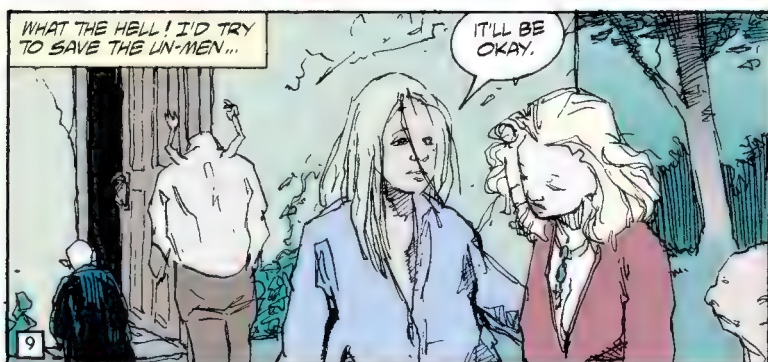
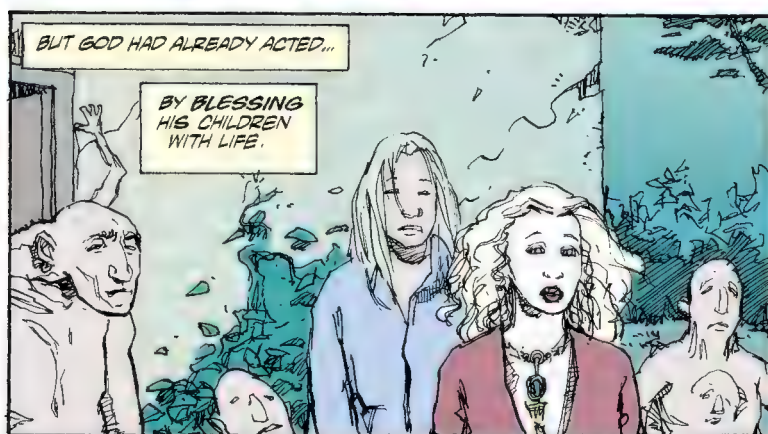
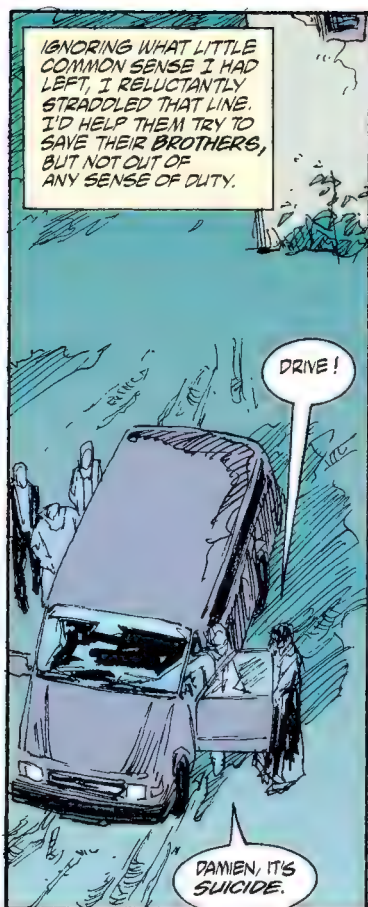
I SEE A BOY TRAPPED INSIDE THE BODY OF A BEAST.

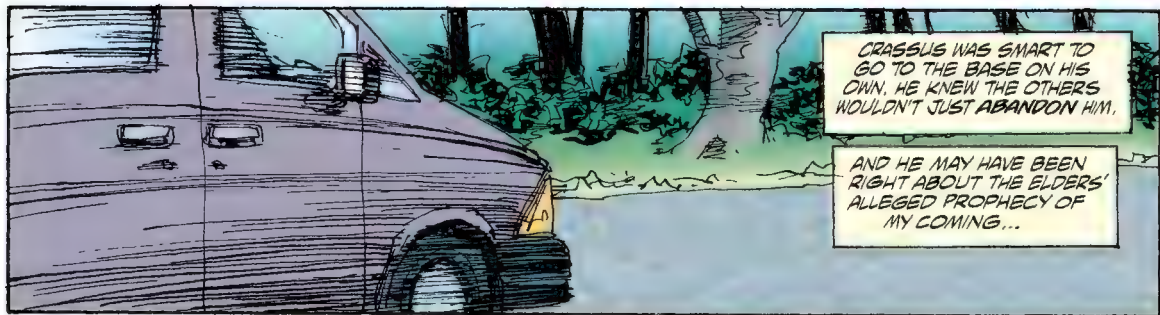
I SEE DAMIEN KANE.





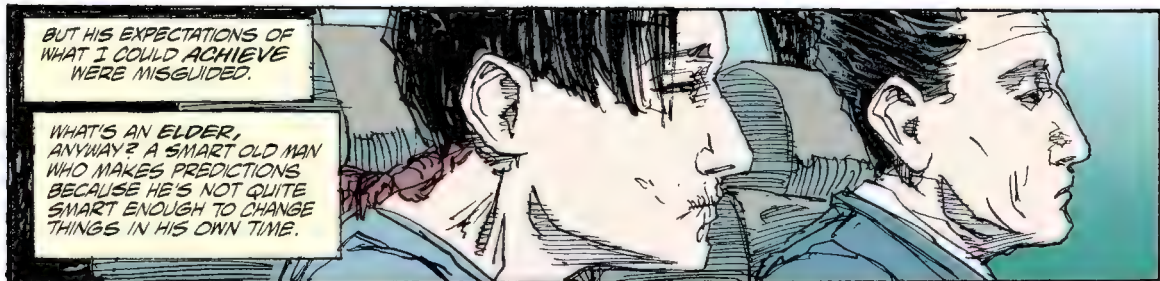






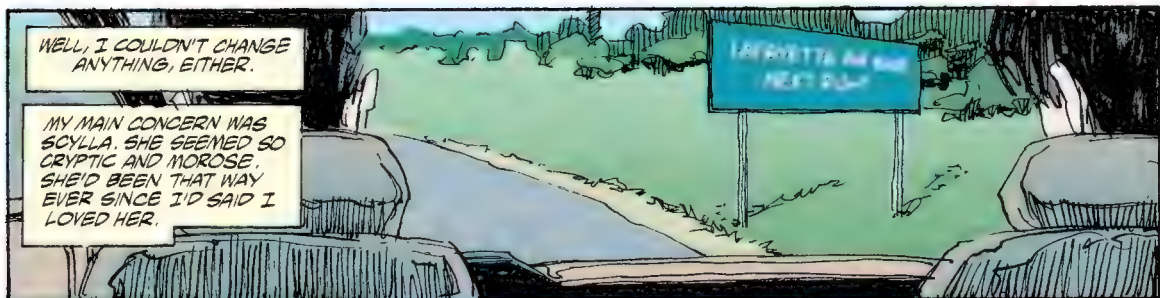
CRASSUS WAS SMART TO GO TO THE BASE ON HIS OWN. HE KNEW THE OTHERS WOULDN'T JUST ABANDON HIM.

AND HE MAY HAVE BEEN RIGHT ABOUT THE ELDERS' ALLEGED PROPHECY OF MY COMING...



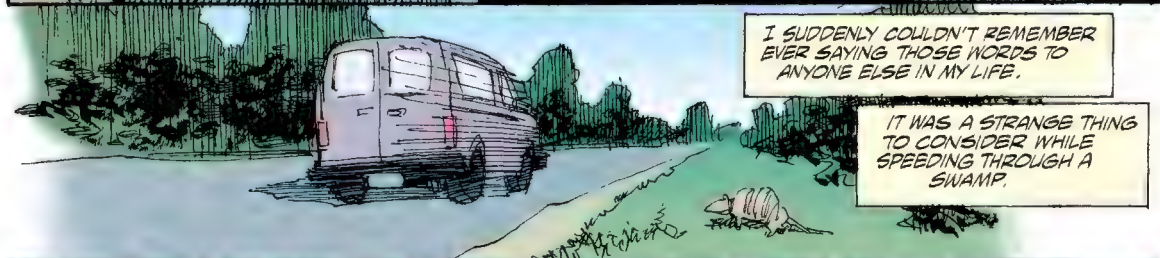
BUT HIS EXPECTATIONS OF WHAT I COULD ACHIEVE WERE MISGUIDED.

WHAT'S AN ELDER, ANYWAY? A SMART OLD MAN WHO MAKES PREDICTIONS BECAUSE HE'S NOT QUITE SMART ENOUGH TO CHANGE THINGS IN HIS OWN TIME.



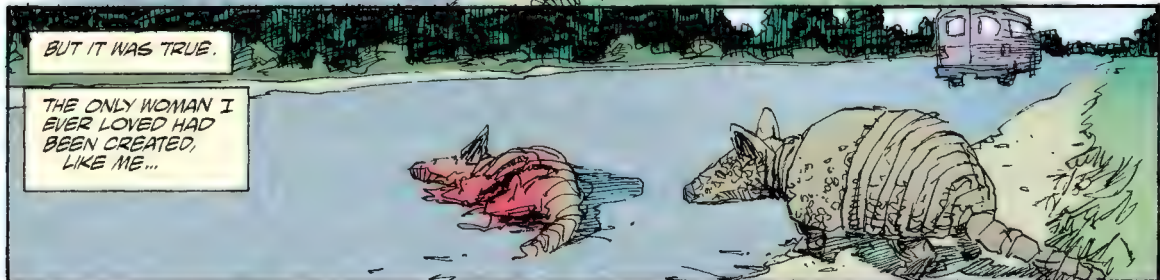
WELL, I COULDN'T CHANGE ANYTHING, EITHER.

MY MAIN CONCERN WAS SCYLLA. SHE SEEMED SO CRYPTIC AND MOROSE. SHE'D BEEN THAT WAY EVER SINCE I'D SAID I LOVED HER.



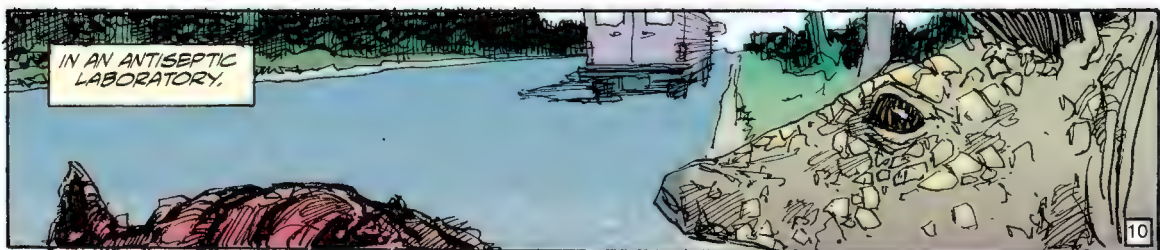
I SUDDENLY COULDN'T REMEMBER EVER SAYING THOSE WORDS TO ANYONE ELSE IN MY LIFE.

IT WAS A STRANGE THING TO CONSIDER WHILE SPEEDING THROUGH A SWAMP.

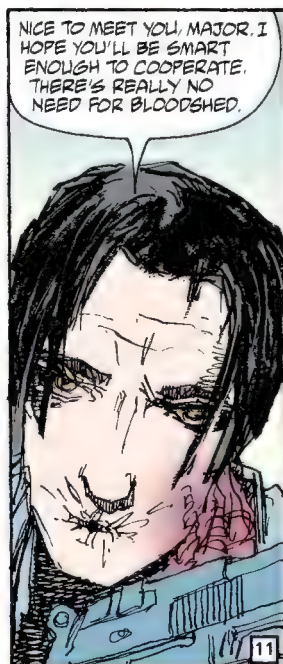
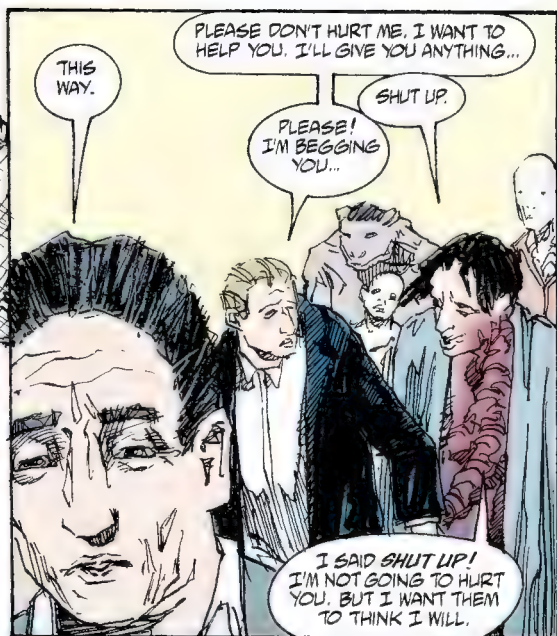
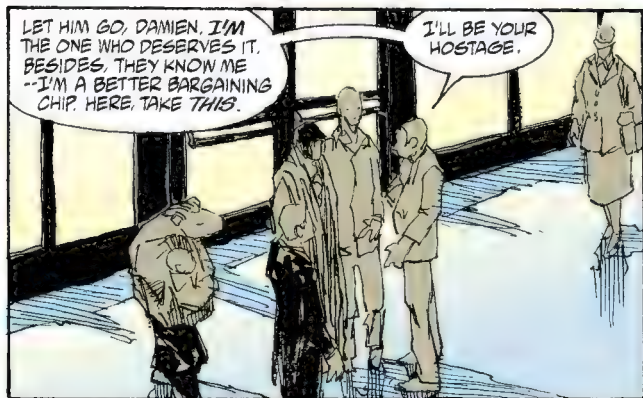
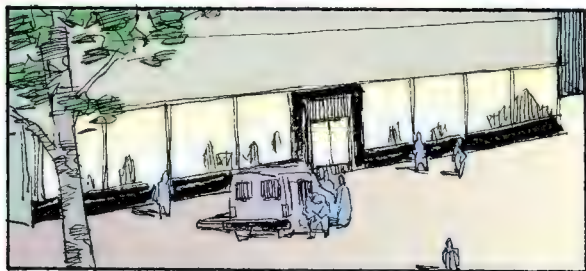
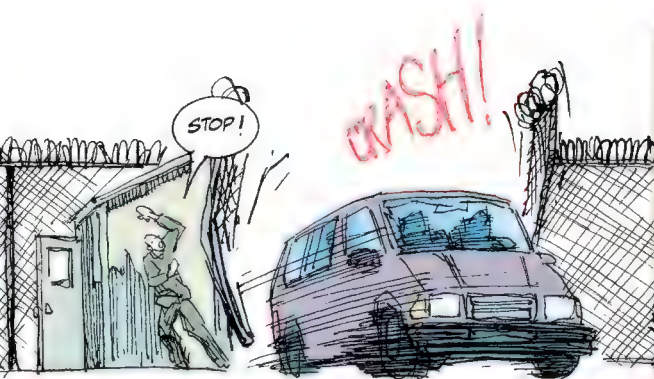


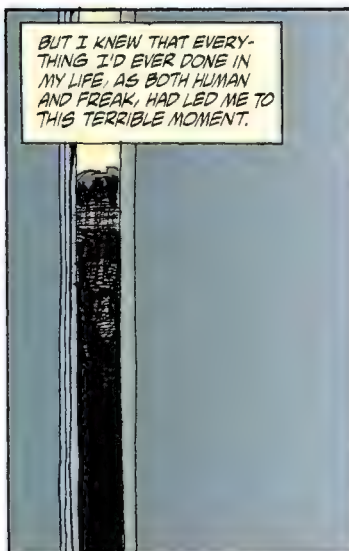
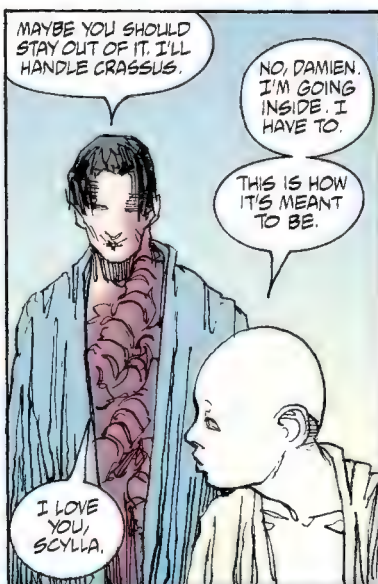
BUT IT WAS TRUE.

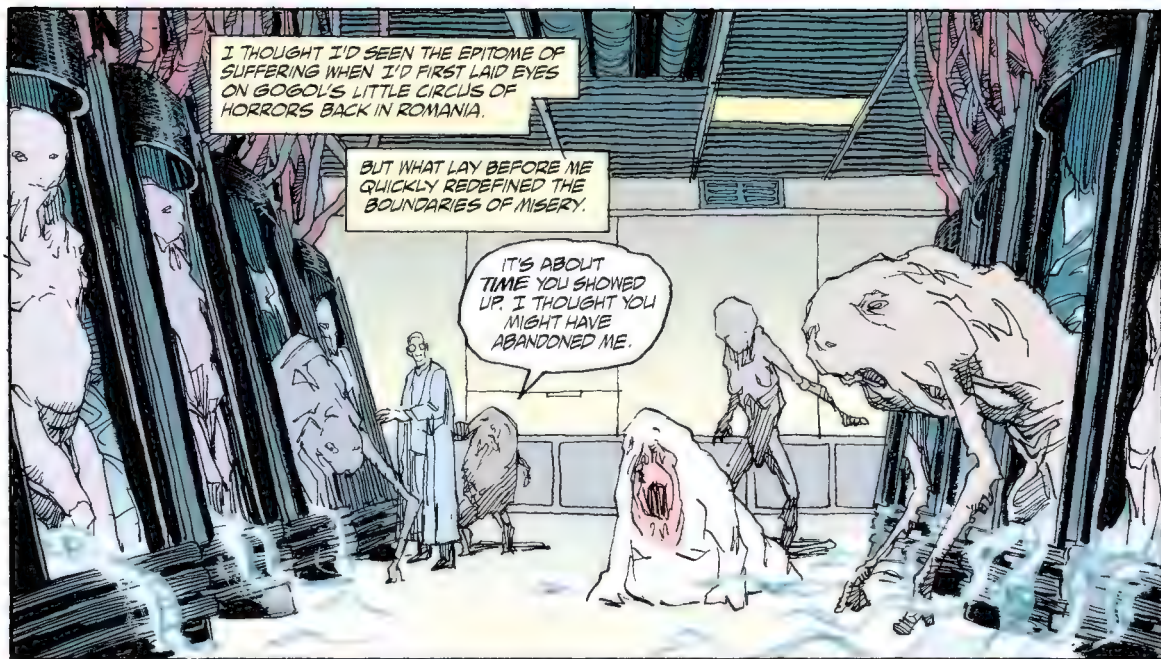
THE ONLY WOMAN I EVER LOVED HAD BEEN CREATED, LIKE ME...



IN AN ANTISEPTIC LABORATORY,



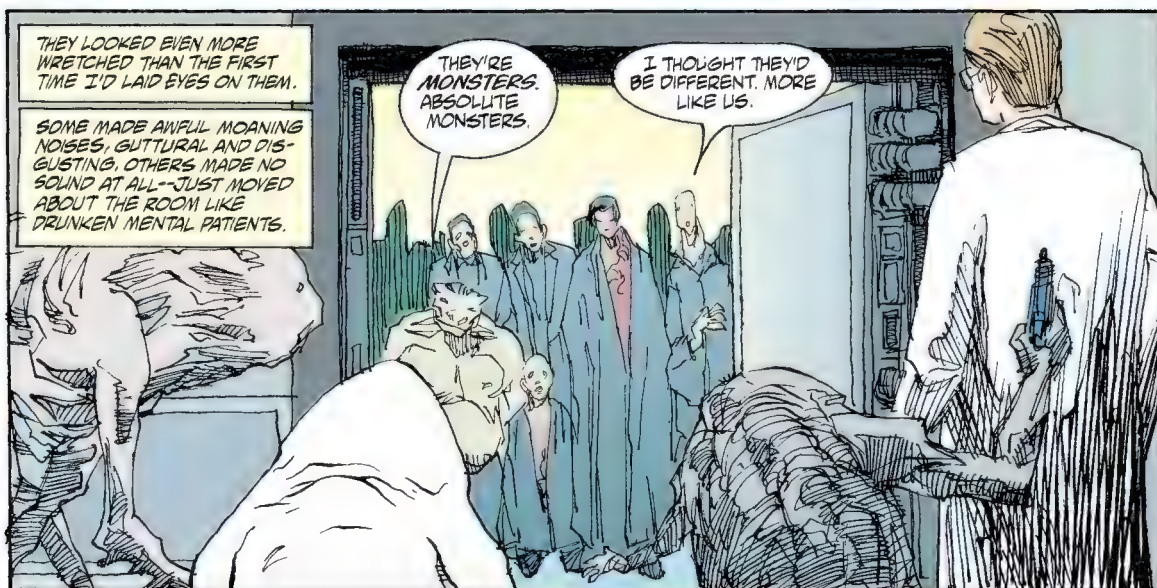




I THOUGHT I'D SEEN THE EPITOME OF SUFFERING WHEN I'D FIRST LAID EYES ON GOGOL'S LITTLE CIRCUS OF HORRORS BACK IN ROMANIA.

BUT WHAT LAY BEFORE ME QUICKLY REDEFINED THE BOUNDARIES OF MISERY.

IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU SHOWED UP. I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT HAVE ABANDONED ME.

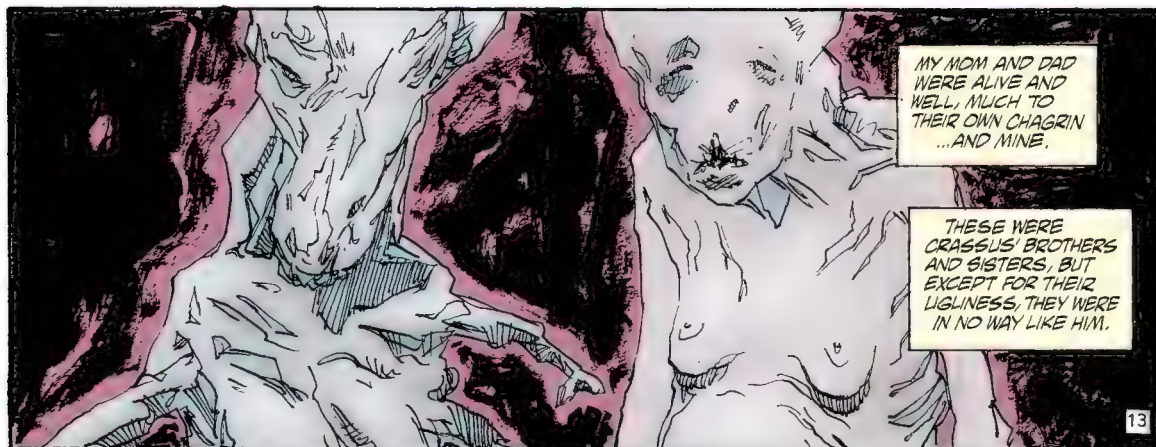


THEY LOOKED EVEN MORE WRETCHED THAN THE FIRST TIME I'D LAID EYES ON THEM.

SOME MADE AWFUL MOANING NOISES, GUTTURAL AND DISGUSTING. OTHERS MADE NO SOUND AT ALL--JUST MOVED ABOUT THE ROOM LIKE DRUNKEN MENTAL PATIENTS.

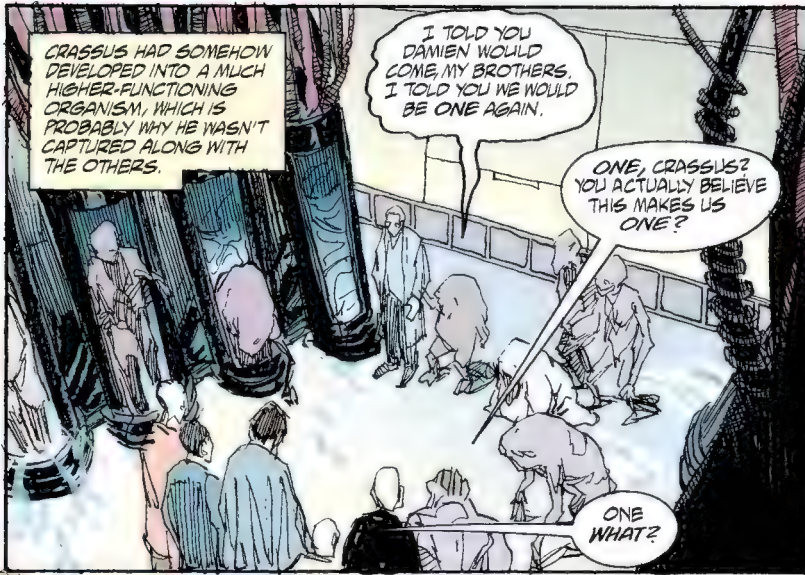
THEY'RE MONSTERS. ABSOLUTE MONSTERS.

I THOUGHT THEY'D BE DIFFERENT. MORE LIKE US.



MY MOM AND DAD WERE ALIVE AND WELL, MUCH TO THEIR OWN CHAGRIN ...AND MINE.

THESE WERE CRASSUS' BROTHERS AND SISTERS, BUT EXCEPT FOR THEIR UGLINESS, THEY WERE IN NO WAY LIKE HIM.



CRASSUS HAD SOMEHOW DEVELOPED INTO A MUCH HIGHER-FUNCTIONING ORGANISM, WHICH IS PROBABLY WHY HE WASN'T CAPTURED ALONG WITH THE OTHERS.

I TOLD YOU DAMIEN WOULD COME, MY BROTHERS. I TOLD YOU WE WOULD BE ONE AGAIN.

ONE, CRASSUS? YOU ACTUALLY BELIEVE THIS MAKES US ONE?

ONE WHAT?



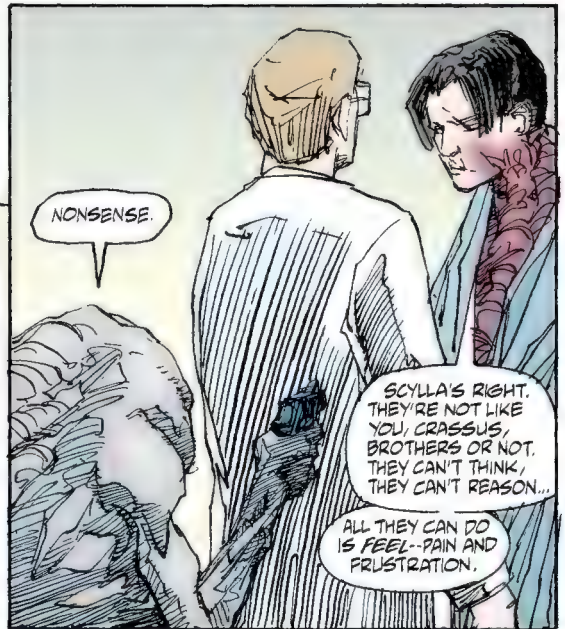
WHY, ONE FAMILY, OF COURSE.



CRASSUS, THEY DON'T WANT TO BE A FAMILY. LOOK AT THEM. I WAS MISTAKEN.



THEY DON'T WANT TO BE AT ALL.



NONSENSE.

SCYLLA'S RIGHT. THEY'RE NOT LIKE YOU, CRASSUS, BROTHERS OR NOT. THEY CAN'T THINK, THEY CAN'T REASON...

ALL THEY CAN DO IS FEEL--PAIN AND FRUSTRATION.



THAT'S NOT TRUE.

THEY FEEL MUCH MORE THAN THAT! THEY FEEL CHEATED. THEY FEEL DEPRIVED. THEY FEEL AN URGE FOR REVENGE AGAINST ARCANÉ.

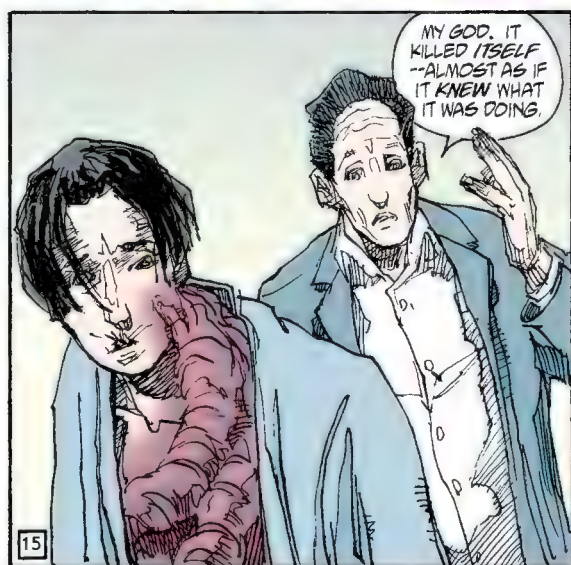
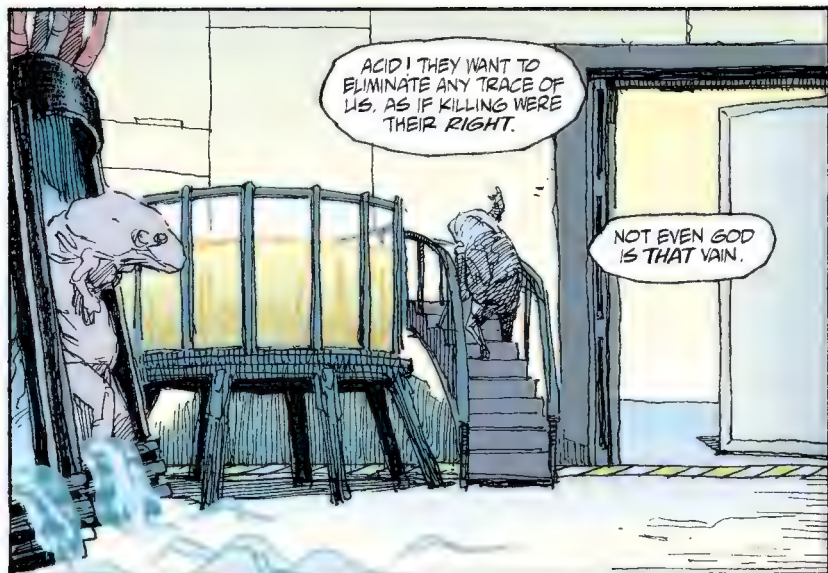
AND THEY WANT YOU TO HELP THEM, DAMIEN.



LET HIM GO, CRASSUS. PLEASE.

WHY?

BECAUSE HE'S INNOCENT.





IT WAS TRUE. THEY WANTED TO DIE. I REALIZED, THEN, THAT THE CRIES FOR HELP I'D HEARD IN MY HEAD FOR SO LONG WERE ACTUALLY PLEAS FOR MERCY--FOR DEATH.

I CAN'T STOP THEM, DAMIEN.

I FELT LIKE A HYPOCRITE FIGHTING THEM OFF, TRYING TO KEEP THEM FROM EXITING A PAINFUL WORLD THEY NEVER BELONGED TO IN THE FIRST PLACE.

IT WAS INSTINCT--HUMAN INSTINCT. THE DRIVE TO PRESERVE LIFE, EVEN IF IT WENT AGAINST MY BETTER JUDGMENT.



STOP IT, STOP IT!

THEY KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING. IT'S WHAT THEY'VE WANTED ALL ALONG. LET IT HAPPEN.

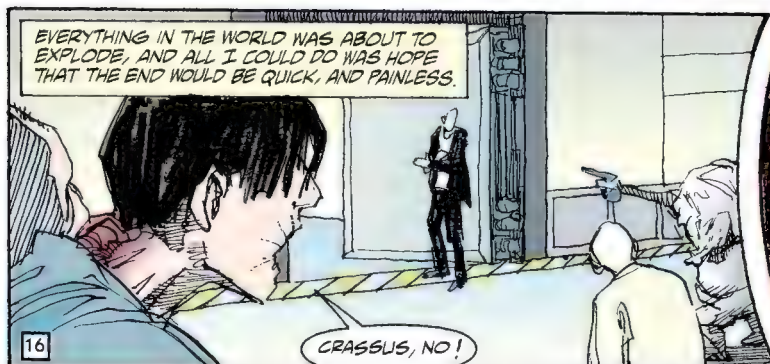
THEY'RE NOT LIKE YOU. LET THEM GO.



I CAN'T. THEY'RE MY BROTHERS.



YOU! GET BACK HERE.

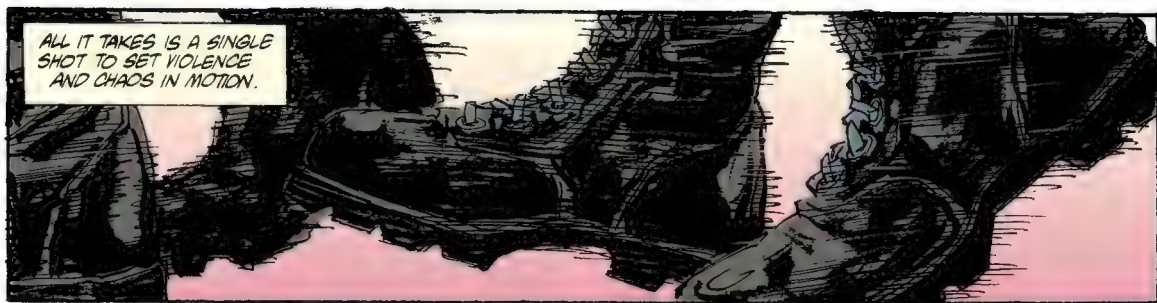


EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD WAS ABOUT TO EXPLODE, AND ALL I COULD DO WAS HOPE THAT THE END WOULD BE QUICK, AND PAINLESS.

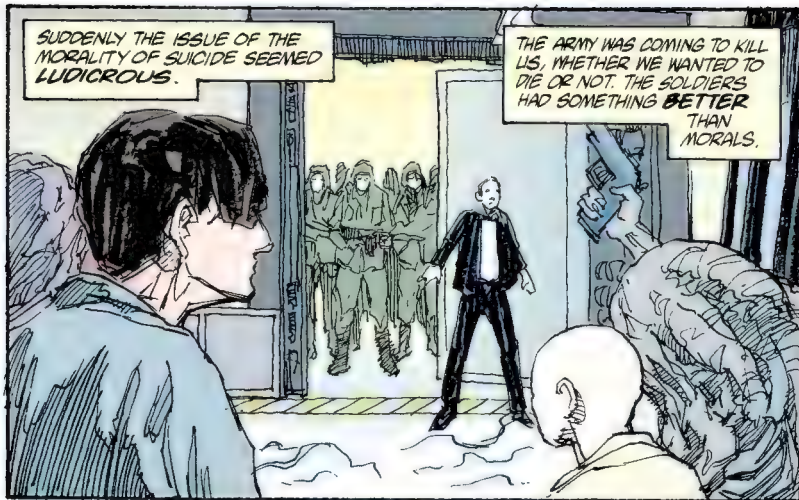
CRASSUS, NO!



BLAM



ALL IT TAKES IS A SINGLE SHOT TO SET VIOLENCE AND CHAOS IN MOTION.



SUDDENLY THE ISSUE OF THE MORALITY OF SUICIDE SEEMED LUDICROUS.

THE ARMY WAS COMING TO KILL US, WHETHER WE WANTED TO DIE OR NOT. THE SOLDIERS HAD SOMETHING BETTER THAN MORALS.



THEY HAD ORDERS.



THE UN-MEN I'D BEEN FIGHTING ONLY A MOMENT BEFORE NOW TURNED AND RAN TOWARD THE BULLETS.

THE SOLDIERS LOOKED SO YOUNG. FROM THE FEAR IN THEIR EYES I COULD TELL THEY'D NEVER IMAGINED SUCH CREATURES EXISTED.

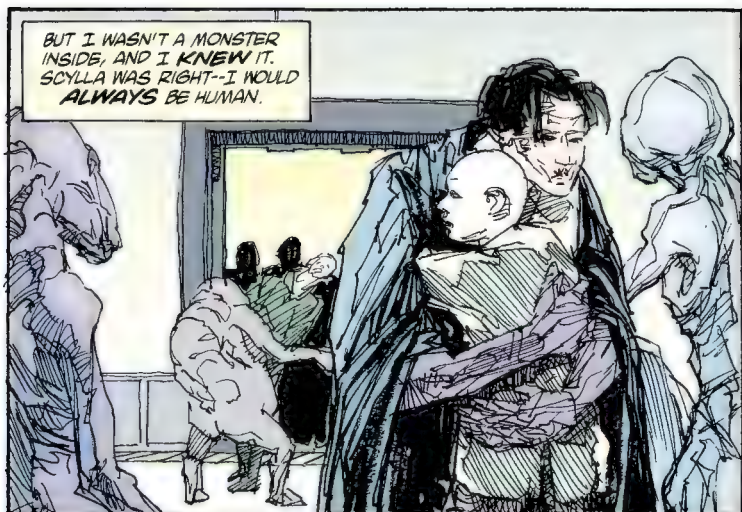


I WAS ONE OF THOSE CREATURES, AND I HAD A HARD TIME BELIEVING IT AS WELL.

THEY WERE JUST NORMAL GUYS, ABOUT MY AGE.



IF I HADN'T BEEN BORN A MONSTER, I MIGHT HAVE BEEN ONE OF THEM.



BUT I WASN'T A MONSTER
INSIDE, AND I **KNEW** IT.
SCYLLA WAS RIGHT--I WOULD
ALWAYS BE HUMAN.



THE LOVE I FELT FOR HER
COULD NEVER GROW INSIDE
A **MONSTER**.



CRASSUS WAS ANOTHER
STORY ENTIRELY. NO
MATTER WHAT HAPPENED,
HE WOULD ALWAYS BE
FILLED WITH HATE. THERE
WAS NO CHANGING IT.



HE HAD
TO BE
STOPPED.



YOU'RE
INSANE.

NO,
DAMIEN, JUST
SICK.



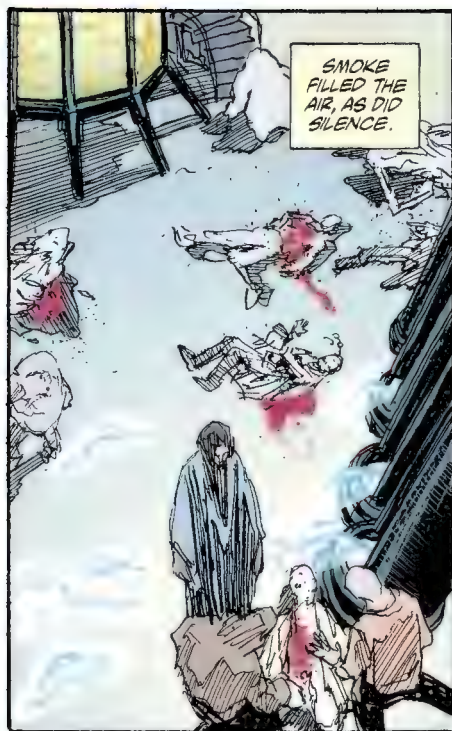
SICK OF THE WORLD
OF MEN. **SICK** OF MEN
WHO CREATE JUST TO
KILL.

I CAN'T CREATE,
DAMIEN, BUT **WATCH**
ME KILL...

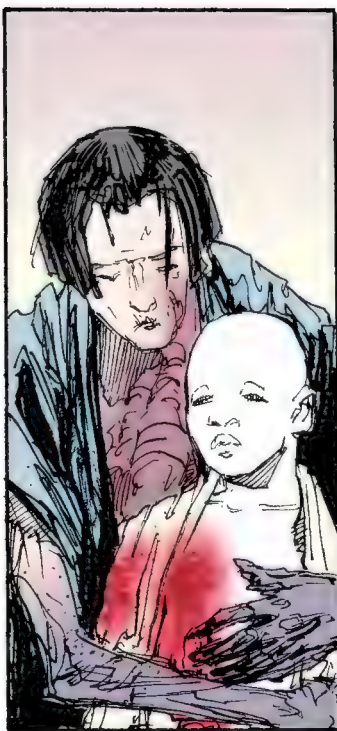


LIKE
A **MAN**!

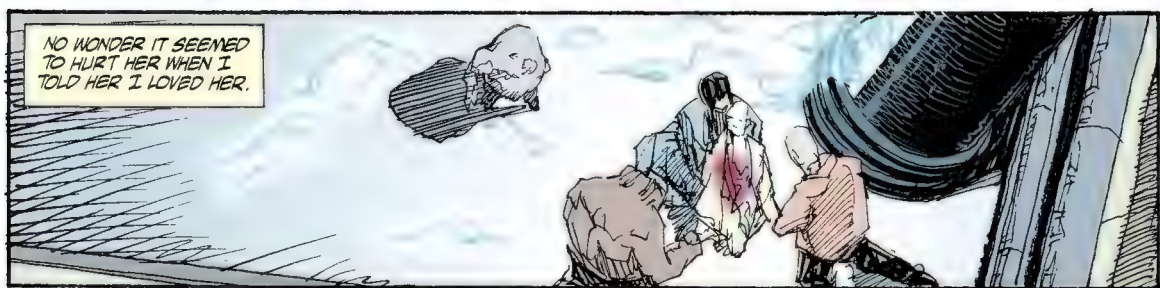




SMOKE
FILLED THE
AIR, AS DID
SILENCE.



SCYLLA KNEW ALL
ALONG SHE WOULD
DIE IN THIS ROOM.
IT WAS THE SECRET
SHE GUARDED SO
CLOSELY.



NO WONDER IT SEEMED
TO HURT HER WHEN I
TOLD HER I LOVED HER.



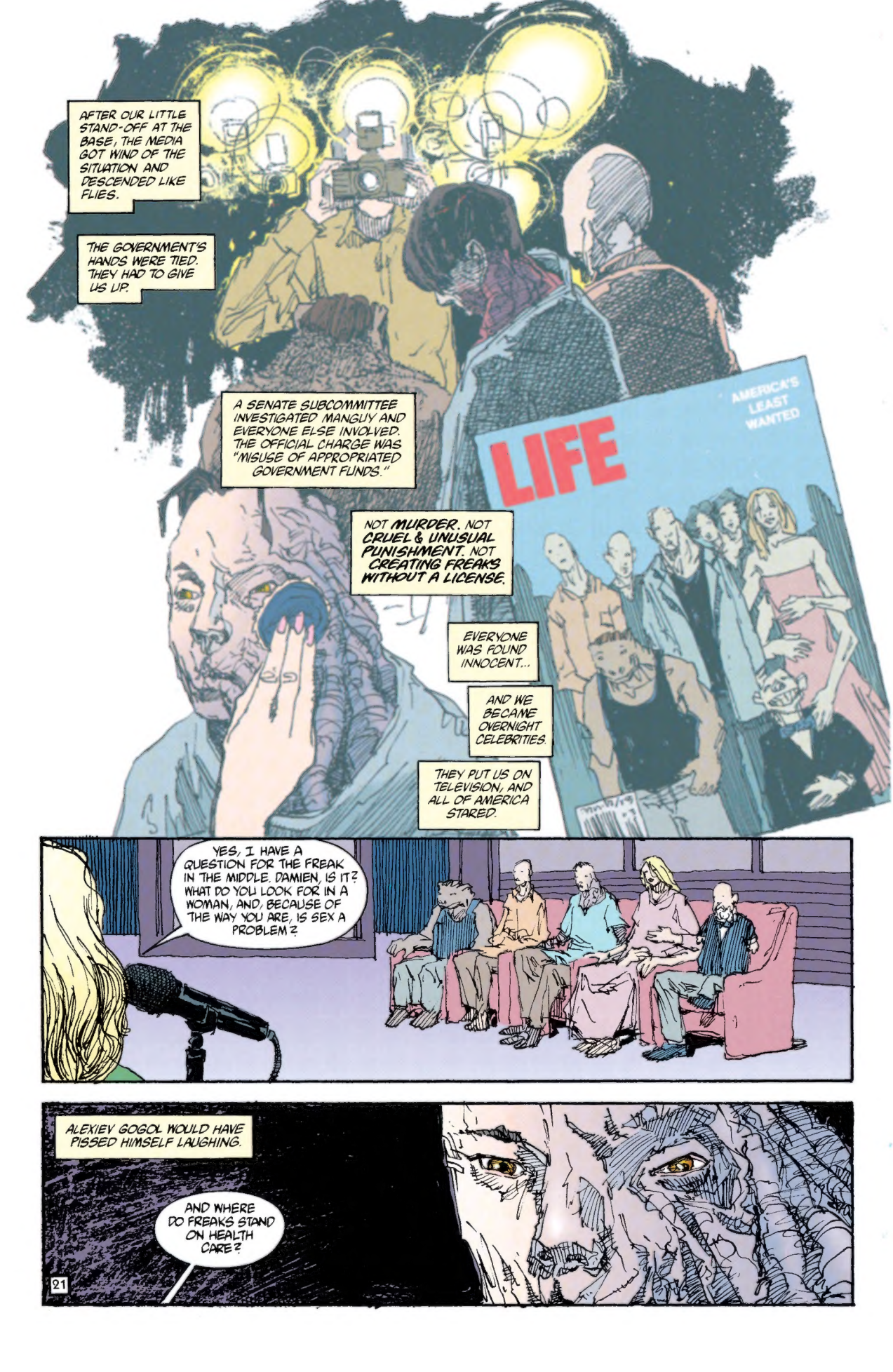
WHAT
HAVE I
DONE...?



THERE WAS A
DARKER SIDE
TO SCYLLA--
ONE SHE TRIED
TO IGNORE...



EVEN IF SHE
KNEW SHE
COULD
NEVER
ESCAPE IT.



AFTER OUR LITTLE
STAND-OFF AT THE
BASE, THE MEDIA
GOT WIND OF THE
SITUATION AND
DESCENDED LIKE
FLIES.

THE GOVERNMENT'S
HANDS WERE TIED.
THEY HAD TO GIVE
US UP.

A SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE
INVESTIGATED MANGUY AND
EVERYONE ELSE INVOLVED.
THE OFFICIAL CHARGE WAS
"MISUSE OF APPROPRIATED
GOVERNMENT FUNDS."

NOT MURDER. NOT
CRUEL & UNUSUAL
PUNISHMENT. NOT
CREATING FREAKS
WITHOUT A LICENSE.

EVERYONE
WAS FOUND
INNOCENT...

AND WE
BECAME
OVERNIGHT
CELEBRITIES.

THEY PUT US ON
TELEVISION, AND
ALL OF AMERICA
STARED.

AMERICA'S
LEAST
WANTED

LIFE

YES, I HAVE A
QUESTION FOR THE FREAK
IN THE MIDDLE. DAMIEN, IS IT?
WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A
WOMAN, AND, BECAUSE OF
THE WAY YOU ARE, IS SEX A
PROBLEM?

ALEXIEV GOGOL WOULD HAVE
PISSED HIMSELF LAUGHING.

AND WHERE
DO FREAKS STAND
ON HEALTH
CARE?

WE WERE A NOVELTY, AND LIKE ALL NOVELTIES, WHEN OUR POPULARITY WANED, WE WERE SET ASIDE AND FORGOTTEN.

AS A GESTURE OF GOOD WILL, THEY GAVE US OUR OWN RESERVATION, ON THE SITE OF AN OLD NUCLEAR TESTING GROUND.

IT SURPRISED ME WHEN WE WERE JOINED BY OTHERS--SOME WHO LOOKED LIKE US, SOME WHO ONLY FELT LIKE US.

THIS PLACE OFFERED LESS THAN MOST SANCTUARIES, BUT NO ONE EVER ASKED FOR MORE.

CRASSUS DISAPPEARED INTO THE SWAMP JUST AFTER THE FIGHT AT THE BASE. THEY SEARCHED FOR HIM, BUT CAME UP EMPTY.

POOR CRASSUS-- SQUATTING IN A BROKEN CRYPT MOURNING HIS UN-MEN BRETHREN, DREAMING OF REVENGE AGAINST A MAN HE'D NEVER FIND.

IT WAS HOME, FOR NOW, AND WE WERE SAFE.

AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, DR. ANTON ARCANE IS DEAD.

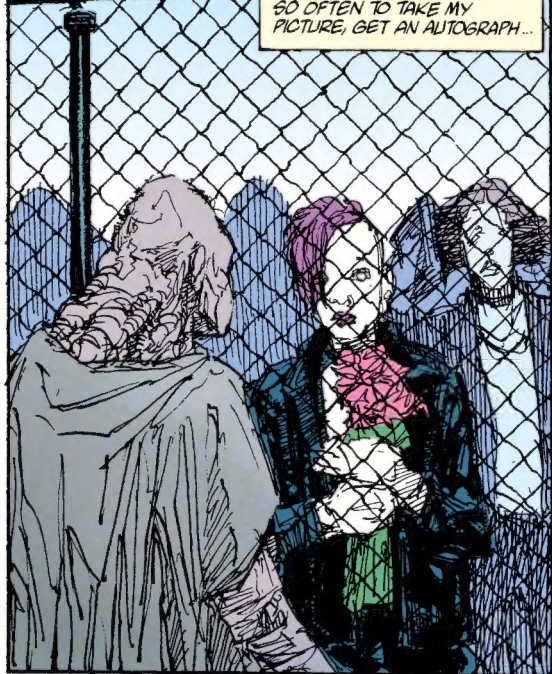
IF I EVER SEE CRASSUS AGAIN, I'LL GIVE HIM THIS MESSAGE: LET IT GO, AND MOVE FORWARD.

THE PRESS STILL WANT THE OCCASIONAL INTERVIEW, BUT WE DON'T ALLOW THEM INSIDE.

IT HELPS TO BELIEVE THAT **THEY'RE** THE OUTSIDERS--THE ONES BEHIND THE FENCE.

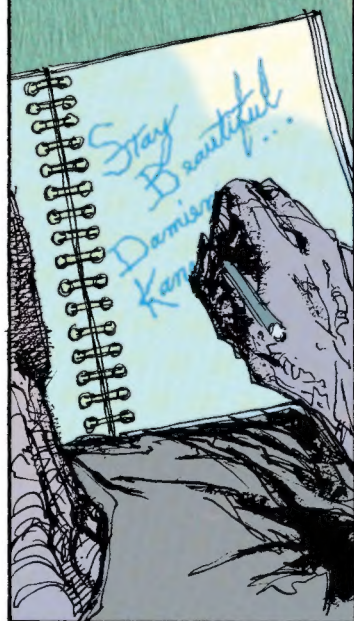


THE INSANE PART IS THE GROUPIES. BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMEN WHO SHOW UP EVERY SO OFTEN TO TAKE MY PICTURE, GET AN AUTOGRAPH...



AND PLEDGE THEIR LOVE, AS THOUGH I WERE A ROCK STAR, OR A SERIAL KILLER.

THEY'RE VERY SWEET, BUT CONFUSED.



THEY DON'T LOVE ME. THEY'RE JUST IN LOVE WITH ALIENATION. IF DR. MANGUN FOUND A MIRACLE CURE AND RESTORED MY HUMAN LOOKS...



THEY'D THINK I'D BETRAYED THEM, AND TOSS ME ASIDE FOR A NEWER, MORE APPEALING FREAK TO WORSHIP.





SCYLLA SAID ALL SHE NEEDED WAS TO FEEL SAFE AND WANTED. I DECIDED THAT WAS GOOD ENOUGH AS WELL.



THE CLOUDS TODAY LOOK LIKE ALBINO TIGERS FLOATING ACROSS AN ENDLESS BLUE SEA.

ON CERTAIN DAYS I CAN SEE THE FACES OF THE ELDERS-- THE ONES WHO SAID I'D COME.



THEY STARE AT ME WITH BENIGN REPROACH, AS IF SAYING "WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?"



"I'M NO ONE," I TELL THEM, "JUST A GUY NAMED DAMIEN."



I KNOW THEY DON'T BELIEVE ME, BUT I REALLY DON'T CARE, NOW.



THEIR FACES FLOAT BY IN SILENCE, CONTROLLED BY THE BREEZE...

UNTIL THEY BREAK APART...

AND DISAPPEAR INTO THIN AIR.

THE END